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## ABSTRACT

Denmark's career guidance system and policies were evaluated. The review team met with policymakers and guidance practitioners in the public and private sectors, analyzed data from a national questionnaire, and reviewed pertinent documentation. The evaluation focused on the following areas: coordinating mechanisms; the role of Denmark's National Council for Educational and Vocational Guidance (RUE); professional development; quality assurance; information provision; and the feedback role of guidance. Key strengths of Denmark's career guidance system were as follows: the wide range of career guidance services offered; the system's decentralized structure, which produces a rich diversity of practice with strong local ownership of services provided; RUE's potential mechanisms for coordination with the regional guidance committees in consultation with relevant partners; and its youth follow-up system and range of "taster" courses. Potential weaknesses included the following: basing the main guidance services within sectors; the fact that large numbers of people, notably adults who are neither unemployed nor enrolled in educational courses, lack access to services; the system's comparatively weak professionalization; and its lack of effective quality assurance procedures. The following items are appended: a list of review team members; the review visit schedule; and a summary of suggestions and recommendations. (Contains 27 footnotes.) (MN)

# OECD REVIEW OF CAREER GUIDANCE POLICIES

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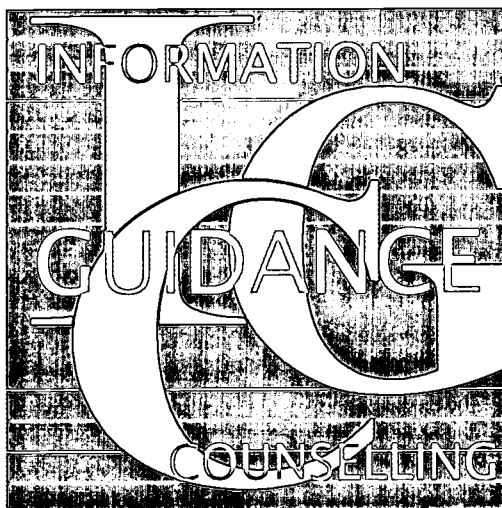
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## DENMARK

### COUNTRY NOTE

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

1. In the autumn of 2000 the OECD's Education Committee and its Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee endorsed a comparative review of career information, guidance and counselling policies. Participating countries complete a detailed national questionnaire, and after its completion host a short one-week visit by an expert review team. Denmark was the second country to host such a visit, from 28 January to 1 February 2002<sup>1</sup>. The team visited a school and youth guidance service, an information centre for entry to higher education, a technical college, an adult training centre, a university, and a careers fair. Meetings were also held with key policy makers in the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Employment, with trainers of guidance professionals, with representatives of employers and trade-union organisations and guidance professional organisations, and with members of national, regional and local co-ordinating bodies for guidance services<sup>2</sup>.

2. Drawing upon the visit, the draft national questionnaire response and other documentation, this report summarises the impressions of the review team, and its suggestions for ways in which policies for career information, guidance and counselling might be developed in Denmark. After a brief contextual introduction, the report describes the key features of the main parts of the system, including some comments on each. It then offers some general comments on six key topics:

- Co-ordinating mechanisms.
- The role of RUE.
- Professional development.
- Quality assurance.
- Information provision.
- The feedback role of guidance.
- Finally, there are some concluding comments.

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1. For members of the review team, see Appendix 1.  
2. For the review visit programme, see Appendix 2.

## 2. THE CONTEXT

3. The Danish economy has recently been in a relatively stable state, with low inflation. GDP growth slowed from 3% in 2000 to 1.25% in 2001<sup>3</sup>. The unemployment rate in 2000 was the lowest for 25 years, at 4.5% (compared with an OECD average of 6.3%); the labour-force participation rate was high by international standards at 80% (OECD average: 70.1%), the rate for women being 75.9% (OECD average: 61.3%). The labour market is strongly service-oriented. Half of workers are in small and medium-sized firms (less than 50 employees). It is a flexible labour market by OECD standards, with relatively weak employment protection balanced by a generous unemployment insurance safety-net. Recruitment difficulties have been experienced in some sectors, especially for skilled labour. Labour shortages could be exacerbated over the next few years by demographic trends, with an anticipated decline in the proportion of the population who will be in economically active age-groups.

4. The tight labour market conditions present challenges to raise labour-force participation rates even higher and to improve skill levels. Measures to increase labour supply could include integrating weak groups on the margins of the labour market (e.g. immigrants and refugees), encouraging older workers to remain in the labour market longer, and stimulating younger workers to enter the labour market earlier by obtaining a faster passage through the initial education system.

5. Levels of investment in education in Denmark are high, at 7.2% of GNP in 1998 (OECD average: 5.7%). Compared to other OECD countries, class sizes are small and student allowances are generous. The policy aim under the 'Education for All' strategy introduced in 1993 has been to raise the proportion of young people completing youth (upper secondary) education to 95%<sup>4</sup> (this aim may be revised under the new Government elected in November 2001). The underlying rationale has been that such high participation rates will contribute to the productivity of the workforce, to low structural unemployment, and to a relatively equal distribution of income (Denmark has a low dispersion of disposable incomes in comparison with other OECD countries). The average age at which young people have made the transition from education to work went up from 21 at the end of the 1980s to 24 in 1996<sup>5</sup>. In part this was because more young people were taking time out of the system, for travel or other purposes; in part because many took detours and turns within the system; in part because an increasing number entered the optional 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Policy measures to obtain a faster passage through the system could include structural steps such as abolishing the 10<sup>th</sup> grade (though this seems unlikely to happen), and more process-oriented measures designed to reduce the number of drop-outs and changes of direction within the system.

6. As part of the Danish strategy for lifelong learning, reforms are currently being introduced in the adult training system. Particular attention is being focused on low-skilled adults and on programmes developing formal and recognised competences targeted on job functions.

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3. Except where stated otherwise, these and other figures are drawn from standard OECD and Danish Government sources.

4. At present 94% enter youth education and 81% complete it. Undervisningsministeriet (2000), *Tal der Taler*. Copenhagen.

5. As measured by the first year of age at which 50% or more of the age cohort were in work but not in education. OECD (1999), *Thematic Review of the Transition from Initial Education to Working Life: Country Note on Denmark*. Paris.

### 3. THE DANISH GUIDANCE<sup>6</sup> SYSTEM

7. The system of educational and vocational guidance in Denmark is fragmented, decentralised and strongly sector-based. It is formally described as comprising 27 different services<sup>7</sup>. Most are located in the different parts of the education system; the rest include services in the public employment service, in the union-based unemployment insurance system, in the municipalities for unemployed people outside this system, and in the defence services.

8. The early development of guidance services in Denmark was as part of the employment service, with vocational guidance counsellors being employed in public employment offices. In the 1970s, however, guidance services grew in most parts of the education system, and these have since become the dominant part of the guidance provision.

9. Denmark is unusual among OECD countries in having specific legislation on educational and vocational guidance. An Act on Vocational Guidance was passed in the mid-1950s. It was replaced in 1981 by an Act on Educational and Vocational Guidance, which was revised in 1996. The legislation, however, simply provides an overall framework for services to be offered by educational institutions, public employment services, and other relevant authorities and agencies. An important co-ordinating role is played by the National Council for Educational and Vocational Guidance (RUE), which acts as an advisory body to the Government and also provides support services, though it has no official authority in relation to guidance provision.

10. In total, there are around 22,500 people employed in guidance roles across the 27 officially recognised guidance services; of these, around half work in the primary and lower secondary school<sup>8</sup>, as guidance counsellors or class teachers. The great majority of these 22,500 are employed primarily as teachers, and perform their guidance roles on a part-time basis: in some cases for a few hours; in some cases for around half of their time. The only major group of full-time guidance counsellors is the 260 vocational guidance counsellors in the Public Employment Service. Some of the various groups of guidance staff belong to one of the eight national sector-focused guidance professional associations, which are linked together beneath an umbrella organisation (FUE).

11. In general, the main focus of the work of guidance counsellors is on educational and vocational guidance. Those working in schools and colleges do sometimes get involved in responding to young people's personal and social problems, but they are not trained to respond to these at any depth, and their main focus is on helping the young people to cope with these problems within the institution and referring them to the more skilled resources available outside<sup>9</sup>.

12. In policy terms, the guidance system is viewed as a valuable feature of the Danish education and training system, linked to the concern for offering choice within this system<sup>10</sup>. It also seems to be regarded

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6. Here and elsewhere the term 'guidance' is used generically, as shorthand for 'career information, guidance and counselling services'.

7. See RUE (2001), *Educational and Vocational Guidance in Denmark*. Copenhagen.

8. Questionnaire response, question 6.2.

9. These include psychological services within the municipalities; and psychological and social services for students in higher education, provided by *Studenterradgivningen* in cities with universities.

10. An earlier OECD review noted that '... the Danes are unusually independent. This stance is grounded in great respect for the individual. So the Danes find it hard to embrace any policy that sharply constrains

as (in the words of one civil servant to whom we spoke) a 'soft steering instrument'. It received attention from the previous Government in relation to the concern to reduce the numbers of students who dropped out of or changed courses. It could also be viewed by the new Government as having a role to play in relation to its concern for accelerating progress through the education system ('quick in, quick out'): a goal being discussed in this respect is 'gaining half a cohort' to respond to the anticipated skilled labour shortages. A further potential policy link is related to the Government's concern for achieving a more inclusive labour market, incorporating marginalised groups like immigrants/refugees, people with disabilities and older workers. At the same time, the new Government's concern for reducing public expenditure could mean pressures on guidance services for more efficient use of resources, including more use of information and communication technologies (ICT), and more evidence that it is delivering value for money.

## 4. THE MAIN SECTORS

### 4.1 Primary and lower secondary school

13. Education is compulsory in Denmark between the ages of 7 and 16. Most children (87%)<sup>11</sup> attend the *folkeskole* (primary and lower secondary school) for this phase, usually remaining with the same mixed-ability form in all subjects, and spending one year at each grade regardless of progress and attainment. There is also an optional 10<sup>th</sup> grade (ages 16-17) within the same school, though an increasing number of pupils take the opportunity to change schools or to go to specialised 10<sup>th</sup>-grade centres at this stage.

14. The average class size in the *folkeskole* is around 19. A class teacher, usually the teacher of Danish, has particular responsibility for attending to the personal needs of pupils and liaising with parents, and is allocated an extra period a week for this purpose. Class teachers normally remain with their groups as they rise within the school. In addition, each school appoints one of its teachers to be a school guidance counsellor for part of their time (the average being around 20%); in larger schools, there may be two such appointments.

15. Three features of the guidance system in the *folkeskole* seem particularly worthy of comment. The first relates to the recent introduction of mandatory individual education plans. Pupils are required to develop such plans from the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, in preparation for the (limited) choice of subject options from the 7<sup>th</sup> grade and subsequently for the more significant choices at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades. As part of this process, pupils are expected to see the guidance counsellor for one individual session in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades, and for two such sessions in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades. The process is supported by an education book: a personal document in which pupils record their achievements and their developing interests and aims.

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personal choice. Their impulse, in fact, is always to widen the range of personal choice'. OECD (1999), *op. cit.*, p.9.

11. Most of the remainder attend independent schools and youth boarding schools. Such schools are obliged by law to offer some guidance to pupils in grades 9 and 10, especially on opportunities in the youth education system, but it is left to them to decide what form this takes and what other guidance provision they make.



The plans themselves have to be signed by the pupil, a parent and the guidance counsellor. From a guidance perspective, this system seems potentially valuable in at least three respects:

- It offers a clear entitlement: an assurance that each pupil will be seen singly on a number of occasions.
- It offers a concrete focal point for such guidance.
- With the education book, it is a powerful vehicle for involving parents actively in the guidance process.

There is however a risk that it will make the guidance process bureaucratic and mechanistic. It is accordingly crucial that adequate time is made available for the process, and that it is supported by strong staff-development programmes.

16. Second, the review team was impressed by the extent of opportunities within the folkeskole both for work experience and for pupils to 'taste' particular educational opportunities before committing themselves. Most pupils undertake at least two different one-week work-experience placements in grades 7-9 (ages 14-16); in addition, they may attend one-week introduction courses run by post-16 educational institutions<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, the optional 10th grade includes 'bridge-building' courses part of which is spent in such institutions. In the technical college we visited, we were told that internally-collected data demonstrated that students who had attended the 'bridge-building' courses were less likely to drop out. In more general terms, these various programmes represent a strong investment in experience-based career-related learning.

17. Third, we were concerned about the rather loose provision for career education within the folkeskole. 'Educational, vocational and labour market orientation' is a mandatory topic throughout grades 1-9, and the Ministry of Education has published guidelines on how it might be delivered across the curriculum. There is however no specification of the number of lessons to be taught, nor are there any mechanisms in place to assure the extent or quality of what is delivered. There is a risk that, with the introduction of individual education plans, the guidance counsellor may offer less support in this area. Yet effective career education would seem important both to inform the processes leading to the plans, and to ensure that maximum learning is derived from the experience-based programmes.

## 4.2 Youth guidance

18. One of the distinctive features of the Danish guidance system is the proactive provision made for contacting young people who have dropped out of formal education. Municipalities are legally obliged to make contact with, and offer guidance to, such young people at least twice a year up to the age of 19; some municipalities extend the system beyond this. In some cases this work is done by the school guidance counsellors; in others, especially the larger municipalities, it is carried out by separate youth guidance counsellors. From the age of 18 such young people become entitled to limited income support, but only if they engage in developing and implementing action plans in consultation with this youth guidance service. The focus, however, is less on viewing them as 'social clients' than as helping them to take up their rights to participate in education and training.

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12. In the part of Copenhagen we visited – the municipality of Gladsaxe – it is the local policy for all students to spend one week at a commercial college and one week at a technical college. Local policies elsewhere, however, may differ.

19. The service needs to be seen alongside an important feature of the Danish education system: its willingness to offer a wide range of alternatives, including options in which young people have considerable scope for, in effect, designing their own curriculum rather than simply choosing between prescribed options. These include, in particular, vocational basic training (EGU), open youth education (FUU) and production schools. We did not have time during our visit to see any of these at first hand, but we are aware from published and other sources that there are innovative guidance processes in these areas which may merit attention from the more formal parts of the system. During the course of our visit the Government announced in its budget statement that FUU is to be discontinued. Among the criticisms of FUU have been its low completion rate (around 50%) and the evidence that it has been colonised by students who were quite capable of doing well in the gymnasium, rather than the disaffected young people for whom it was primarily designed. We would note only that this latter at least avoids the dangers of negative labelling which have undermined provision for disaffected young people in other countries. In considering what might be learned from FUU for the provision which will follow it, this point may merit attention.

### 4.3 Vocational education and training

20. In the vocational education and training system, reforms have recently been introduced<sup>13</sup> which have considerable implications for guidance provision. Two aims of the reforms are particularly significant in this respect.

21. The first is to achieve a simpler structure, with fewer and broader admission channels into VET courses. The new structure offers only seven access routes (compared with 90 before): six into technical courses and one into commercial courses. Those who have a clear and specific route in view and have the requisite basic competences are able to move quickly through this phase; those who have not made up their minds are able to take more time, exploring possibilities with the support of individual and group guidance. Here again, as with the 'taster' opportunities (see para.16), the concern of the system to provide opportunities for active exploration prior to commitment is impressive.

22. The second is the introduction of much greater flexibility within the learning programmes, with a modular curriculum, resource-based learning methods, and individual pathways supported by tutorial structures, recognition of prior learning, personal education plans, log-books and individual study portfolios. This in principle sets the skills and concerns of the guidance counsellors at the heart of the teaching and learning process. Some of the larger technical colleges have clearly recognised this, seeking to harness the energies of their guidance counsellors not only for delivering guidance services to students but also for working with teaching staff in a consultancy role. This is replacing the guidance counsellors' own teaching commitments: it seems possible that in future the guidance counsellors will spend around half of their time on guidance work and the rest on consultancy work, and do no direct teaching apart from careers education.

23. The new reforms are still at an early stage, and colleges are in the throes of addressing the substantial demands they are making on their staff. This sector seems likely, however, to be one of the most exciting areas of innovation both in learning and in guidance provision over the next few years.

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13. See Danish Ministry of Education (1999), *New Structure of the Danish Vocational Education and Training System*. Copenhagen.



#### 4.4 General upper secondary school

24. In the general upper secondary school (*gymnasium*), by contrast, the curriculum is still structured in a traditional way, with relatively formal teaching methods. The educational guidance counsellors usually spend between a third and half of their time on guidance-related tasks. These include individual guidance and some group sessions. The guidance counsellors often also play a valuable role in collaboration with the *folkeskole* in relation to bridge-building and other transition-related issues. Interestingly, this is the only major sector for which there are clear national standards for resource allocation to guidance provision.

25. The guidance work in the *gymnasium* is focused almost entirely on options within the school and on entry to higher education. Many of the guidance counsellors have had limited personal experience outside these institutions, and their networks tend to be narrower than in other parts of the guidance system. Little if any attention is paid to helping students to continue to develop their understanding of the world of work, to clarify or review their career intentions, or to reflect on the relevance of their studies to their future career.

#### 4.5 Higher education

26. If the guidance system in the *gymnasium* is relatively narrow, the same is even more the case in parts of the higher education system, particularly the general universities. Moreover, guidance services here are much less strongly professionalised. The main guidance services within higher education institutions take two main forms. The first is the central study guidance services, which cover potential students, entering students, and students considering major changes of course of study. The study advisers combine their guidance role with administrative roles, and most view themselves primarily as administrators. The second is the tutorial guidance services within particular areas of study: these confine themselves largely to students' choices and progress within their chosen field, and are offered mainly by teachers and by advanced students. The main form of training for the advisers in both of these two services was formerly short one-week courses; a review in 1996 found that only 40% had even attended these courses.<sup>14</sup> The length of the courses has since been increased to four weeks.

27. The significance attached to supporting entry to higher education is demonstrated by the establishment in 1995 of a network of higher education information centres (ivu\*Cs), operating on a walk-in self-service basis in five major towns. They were set up partly to reduce the load on other higher education guidance services, by providing a central access point for potential higher education students who were not currently enrolled in the *gymnasium* or another educational institution (many young people have a gap of a year or two before entering higher education, in order to earn money and/or travel) and by performing a brokerage role in arranging visits from higher education institutions to the *gymnasiums*. Another part of their role was to collect and distribute information about vacant study-places in higher education.

28. None of these services, however, are designed to offer any significant informed help to students in relation to their career plans or to entering the graduate labour market at the end of their studies. The central study guidance services may organise meetings on making job applications and preparing curricula vitae. Some courses build links with employers, and these may include work-experience placements or internships. Some trade unions organise meetings on career-related matters as part of their recruitment drives. Only one university, however, has so far set up a central careers service, and even this is very small. The assumption in the general universities appears to be that most students can effectively manage their

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14. See Plant, P. (1998), *New Skills for New Futures: Higher Education Guidance and Counselling Services in Denmark*. FEDORA, Louvain-la-Neuve.

exit into the graduate labour market for themselves without difficulty. This may have been sustainable when their student body covered a small academic elite and when the normal pattern was for this elite to enter a narrow field of work closely related to their studies. It is however much more questionable when the number of students is much larger and more diverse, and when the links between their studies and the fields open to them are much more complex.

29. The effect of the weak and inward-looking nature of guidance services in both the *gymnasium* and in important parts of the higher education system is that many of the most able young people in Denmark have little if any help in supporting their career development throughout some of the most formative years of their lives. The lack of links with the labour market is reinforced by the 'taximeter' system in higher education, under which institutions are funded according to the number of students who successfully complete their courses, regardless of what happens to them thereafter. This tends to set the bounds of their concerns; no incentives are offered here or in their performance contracts for institutions to support students' effective transitions into the labour market. Few institutions or programmes even have any systematic information on what has happened to their students, to inform their educational planning or their guidance provision. Although institutions are likely in the near future to be legally required to offer greater 'transparency' regarding their educational offerings to potential students, the requirements appear unlikely to include attention to post-course destinations or subsequent career patterns. Yet public investment in higher education is justified partly on the assumption that it will lead to labour-market outcomes, and most students enter their courses on the assumption that there will be vocational rewards for the time and efforts they are investing in their studies. Guidance services in the *gymnasium* and in the general universities seem to pay little attention to helping students to test such assumptions against the courses on offer or to clarify and realise the ambitions that are latent within them. Instead, they seem to be designed almost exclusively to helping educational institutions to operate effectively as an insulated system. In this respect, Denmark seems to be lagging some way behind other European countries<sup>15</sup>.

#### 4.6 The Public Employment Service

30. The Public Employment Service offers a guidance and placement service which in principle is open to all. In practice, its services are used mainly by adults, particularly those who are unemployed. Open-access job centres provide vacancy boards, ICT-based vacancy databases, and information on education and training opportunities. They also offer opportunities for an interview with a guidance counsellor or placement officer. These may range in length from a few minutes to (in the case of some interviews with the guidance counsellors) up to an hour. There are also group sessions on, for example, job-seeking skills.

31. The roles of guidance counsellor and placement officer have recently become more blurred: it is accepted that placement officers may offer some basic guidance, and that guidance counsellors may be involved in developing individual action plans. Previously the guidance counsellors were viewed as sitting to some extent outside the organisational culture ('a state within the state'); now, however, they are more fully integrated into this culture, which is strongly focused on serving the needs of the labour market and on leading to a concrete outcome in terms of entry to employment or education/training (both outcomes are regarded as of equal value for accountability purposes). The training for the guidance counsellor role is conducted in-house, as part of the general training programme for Public Employment Service staff: it comprises a two-week course on top of the basic three-month initial training provided for all staff. This represents a reduction from the former training pattern. In short, it seems that the role of the guidance counsellor within the service has changed to some extent from a professional role to an organisational role.

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15. *Ibid.*

32. Until 1990, the Public Employment Service had a monopoly of placement services: in other words, it was illegal, except with special authorisation, for other bodies to maintain registers of vacancies and job-seekers in order to provide a matching service<sup>16</sup>. Such restrictions have now been abolished, and a range of private-sector organisations has emerged in the placement field, including web-based recruitment companies.

33. Some further details of the Public Employment Service are included in our brief review of guidance services for different groups of adults, to which we now turn.

#### 4.7 Other guidance services for adults

34. Guidance services for adults in Denmark are, as in most countries, patchy. They are more widely available to some groups than to others.

35. Adults enrolled in the various branches of adult education have access to guidance services from part-time guidance counsellors, as in other parts of the education system. Some of these branches have been part of the VET reforms (see Section 4.3 above). The services include educational and vocational guidance in relation to courses in Danish as a second language: these provide an important initial guidance service for immigrants and refugees<sup>17</sup>. As elsewhere, however, many of these services are stronger on educational opportunities than on labour-market issues, and they tend to focus mainly on opportunities within the institution in which they are based.

36. Provision is also extensive for unemployed adults. They are only allowed to remain on benefits for five years, and before the end of 12 months of unemployment (6 months in the case of individuals under 25) are required to be 'activated': i.e. to see a placement officer or guidance counsellor in the Public Employment Service or municipalities, and to develop and seek to implement an individual action plan which includes gaining entry into education/training, a job, or a job-creation programme. Those who are members of trade unions also have access to guidance counsellors in the union-based unemployment insurance system. In both cases, the fact that the guidance is linked to administration of benefit entitlements may place some limits on the neutrality of the guidance that is offered.

37. For employed adults and adults outside the labour market who are not enrolled in the education system, access to guidance provision is much more limited. The guidance counsellors and placement officers in the Public Employment Service are in principle available to everyone; in practice, however, the stigma stemming from their association with the unemployed deters many other people from using them. There have been a few experiments in setting up open-access career centres in well-populated locations, but some have closed after a period because there has been no framework for sustaining them.

38. In the workplace, some companies make provision for annual career development reviews leading to training plans. Such provision is often part of collective agreements with the trade unions on competence development, and is concerned not only with guidance but also with negotiation between individual and employer. The Government has set an objective of ensuring that as many people as possible participate in continued competence development activities<sup>18</sup>. In addition, some trade unions have run

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16. OECD (1996), *The Public Employment Service: Denmark, Finland, Italy*. Paris.

17. The previous Government set an objective of increasing the labour-force participation rate of immigrants from 57% to 65% by 2010. See The Danish Government (2001), *National Action Plan for Employment 2001*. Ministry of Labour & Ministry of Economic Affairs, Copenhagen.

18. See *ibid*, p.20.

courses for their shop stewards to act as 'educational ambassadors' in encouraging their members to access education and training opportunities; some also provide some limited career-development services for their members. In a few cases, the Public Employment Service has become involved in work within companies in relation to job-rotation schemes (under which employees are released for a period for education/training while their job is filled by someone from the unemployment register to develop their job-retention skills). The defence services have their own guidance services for regular staff as well as for conscripts, partly to support their competence development and partly to ease their re-entry to civilian life. Most of these services, however, are weakly professionalised, diverse in quality, and more extensive in public-sector organisations, large companies and knowledge-based companies than in other small and medium-sized companies.

39. One group for which there appears to have been little consideration to date is those in the 'third age' who are about to leave the labour market or have already done so. This group is increasing in size, and is of growing importance in policy terms. Guidance could have a significant role to play partly as a means of encouraging older workers to consider remaining in the labour force longer, and partly to support policies related to active living, in order to reduce health bills and to harness the communal contribution of senior citizens.

40. It would seem, then, that there are major gaps in current provision for adults. If the new Government is interested in stimulating adults to pay more attention to lifelong learning and to sustaining their employability, linked to optimising the potential benefits of Denmark's flexible labour market (see para.3), this could be an important area for new policy development. It is also an area where distance guidance through helplines and websites linked with face-to-face contact may have much to offer.

## **5. KEY POLICY ISSUES**

### **5.1 Co-ordinating mechanisms**

41. There has been a clear recognition in Denmark that in a diverse, devolved and sector-based guidance system, there is a need for strong co-ordinating mechanisms to encourage continuity of support to individuals and to help the sector-based services to avoid being too inward-looking. Particularly important in this respect is the Danish Council for Educational and Vocational Guidance (RUE), whose role is discussed in Section 5.2 below. Beneath it sit 14 Regional Guidance Committees (VFU), linked to the structure of Regional Labour Market Councils (RAR). All the major guidance services are represented on the VFUs, with a secretariat provided by the Public Employment Service. Their role includes distributing information materials and running cross-sectoral staff-development events. They commonly have sub-committees dealing with the key interfaces: between youth education and higher education, for example, or between different services for adults. They also co-ordinate a structure of Local Guidance Committees (LVU), which conduct similar activities at local level: Copenhagen has 8 of these. The LVUs may, for instance, establish co-ordinated local arrangements for work-experience placements, so that employers are not receiving a range of competing requests from different institutions.

42. The effectiveness of these co-ordinating mechanisms continues to be questioned. References are made to the 'jungle' of guidance practices, with individuals having to repeat guidance activities

unproductively and with (in some cases at least) confusion about where they should go for help. A recent report from the Ministry of Education on cross-sectoral guidance<sup>19</sup> was critical of the current arrangements. It recommended a more cross-sectoral approach to the training of guidance practitioners (see Section 5.3 below). It also recommended the establishment of two new sets of cross-sectoral centres: one at the interface between the *folkeskole* and the various forms of youth education; the other at the interface between youth education and higher education. It was suggested that there should be around 50 of the former (to service the 275 municipalities and 14 counties, and perhaps to incorporate the LVUs) and 6-8 of the latter (perhaps to incorporate the ivu\*Cs – see para.27 above). There appears to be uncertainty at present about the extent to which these centres would simply be service centres to guidance counsellors, who would remain within their existing institutions (the ‘weak’ form); and the extent to which they would see clients, in which case they would have to appoint their own guidance staff and/or provide an operating base for at least some of the institution-based guidance counsellors for part of their time (the ‘strong’ form). There is also lack of clarity about whether the centres would be funded by new money (in which case they would be generally supported) or draw money from institutions (in which case they would probably be widely resisted).

43. In addition to these proposals, it seems that consideration is currently being given in some circles to the idea of a third cross-sectoral centre: for adult guidance. Again, this could both provide services and networking activities between existing guidance services, and/or offer direct services to adults, building upon the experience already gained from piloting one-stop career centres (see para.37 above).

44. This offers the prospect, then, of three new co-ordinating arrangements. Each might have different functions and ways of operating. It nonetheless raises the question of who will co-ordinate the co-ordinating bodies, and whether it might be more effective as well as less costly to think of a single centre operating on an all-age basis. This might lead to significant cost savings; it might also lead to new synergies (e.g. using information on adult career patterns gained through services to adults to inform guidance for young people; or encouraging young people and their parents to come together to the same centre). The chief obstacle towards moving in this direction appears to be the difficulties of achieving concerted action between the different administrative levels at which the three sets of services are currently funded.

45. Beyond this, there are more radical questions about whether these co-ordinating arrangements are merely an expensive cosmetic device for covering the basic flaws of an exclusively sector-based system. The ‘strong’ form of the proposals could be seen as moving, gradually and organically, towards a more mixed model, including more guidance resources in community locations to complement those within educational institutions, which might have more capacity for flexible adaptation to more diverse needs.

## 5.2 The role of RUE

46. The National Council for Educational and Vocational Guidance (RUE) is clearly pivotal as an instrument for coherence and strategic development in the guidance field in Denmark. Its structure has included strong representation from both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, but until recently was primarily responsible to the Ministry of Labour. Under the new Government, however, responsibility for RUE has been moved from this Ministry (now the Ministry for Employment) to the Ministry of Education. This may be linked to the fact that responsibility for adult vocational training has also been moved from the one ministry to the other, thus further increasing the Ministry of Education’s stake in the guidance field. The risk with the change is that it will weaken still further the links between the guidance system and the labour market, the weaknesses of which we have already commented upon and

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19. Ministry of Education Report B131.



will comment on further below. The potential benefit is that RUE's work may be of higher priority in the Ministry of Education, which may therefore have a stronger interest in ensuring that it is effective.

47. In these terms, greater clarity seems to be needed about where RUE fits into the policy development process. It seems curious, for example, that it was not involved in any significant way in producing the recent report on cross-sectoral guidance (see para.42 above). It might also be worth giving consideration to reducing the size of the Council, possibly by moving some of the bodies represented there on to a separate advisory body, thus making it more effective in its strategic role.

48. In addition to this strategic role, RUE is also responsible for the provision of national information materials (see Section 5.5 below). It is argued by some that these two roles do not sit easily together: that, for example, the practical issues related to the information role consume too much time in Council meetings, distracting attention from more important strategic issues. On balance, we are persuaded that RUE benefits from having tangible products to show for its work, and that this enhances its credibility with the various groups with which it has to work. It might be helpful, however, to introduce clearer internal separation between the two roles, and to minimise the time which the Council devotes to the information role, perhaps by delegating it to a sub-committee.

### 5.3 Professional development

49. The Danish guidance system is weakly professionalised in comparison with some other OECD countries. Many guidance practitioners regard themselves primarily as teachers rather than as guidance professionals. Only in 7 of the 27 types of services officially recognised by RUE are there specific requirements for compulsory training of guidance personnel<sup>20</sup>. In most other sectors, there is an expectation that these personnel will undertake training, but in some cases they do so after being in post for a while, and some never do so. Thus some individuals operating in paid guidance roles have had little or no training at all for these roles. This must affect the quality of the service they provide.

50. The training provision is also, like the system itself, strongly sector-related. There are 15 different types of basic guidance courses, of different lengths<sup>21</sup>; thus, for example, guidance counsellors in the *folkeskole* and youth follow-up programmes receive a basic training of 240-360 hours, those in vocational education and training receive 518 hours, those in general upper secondary schools receive 215 hours. The length ranges from the four-week courses for study advisers in higher education to 1,680 hours in a programme for guidance counsellors with no teaching qualifications who are working in adult education or other settings.

51. A proposal in the Ministry of Education report on cross-sectoral guidance (see para.42 above) offers a potential solution to both of these problems. It is proposed to establish a new cross-sectoral diploma programme to cover all sectors of education. This has been discussed frequently in the past<sup>22</sup>. It seems however that there may be sufficient energy behind the proposal on this occasion to convert it into action. There are still issues about the likely length of the common training (a feasible possibility might be the equivalent of 6 months full-time, spread over one or two years) and about the extent to which there might be possibilities within a modular structure for optional sector-sensitive modules built around a common core. But if implemented, it will open up possibilities for reducing the negative effects of sectoral

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20. Questionnaire response, question 6.3.

21. See RUE (2001), *Educational and Vocational Guidance in Denmark*, Section 5. Copenhagen.

22. See e.g. Plant, P. (1993), *Educational and Vocational Guidance Services in Denmark*, pp.20-21. Commission of the European Communities, Brussels (mimeo).



divisions and for establishing guidance more strongly as a kind of sub-profession within the teaching profession.

52. This leaves open, however, the question of the implications of such developments for guidance services outside education. There seems little likelihood, for example, that the new cross-sectoral training will embrace the guidance counsellors within the Public Employment Service (see para.31). There is a danger, therefore, that the new developments will further institutionalise the division between educational guidance (the primary concern of many education-based services) and vocational guidance (the primary concern of services based outside education). Yet most educational choices have vocational implications, while most vocational choices imply educational requirements. As we have seen, one of the major criticisms of some education-based guidance provision is its lack of concern with vocational matters. Until the mid-1970s vocational guidance counsellors from the Public Employment Service used to visit schools; now, however, the service has no active presence within education, apart from its administrative support for the Regional Guidance Committees (see para.41 above) and tokenistic appearances at careers fairs and the like. If its guidance counsellors continue to be trained totally separately from the education-based guidance counsellors, these divides will be reinforced.

53. Three further matters merit comment in relation to the issue of professional development. One relates to the case for paying more attention in counsellor training to organisational consultancy skills. This is relevant, for example, to the curriculum consultancy role being developed by some guidance counsellors in vocational colleges (see para.22): if the changes in curriculum structures and learning methods being introduced here spread to other parts of the education system – as, if they prove successful, they may well do – such a role may prove relevant there too. It is also pertinent to supporting the feedback role (see Section 5.6 below). A further potential area of application is supporting employers in establishing career-development review programmes (see para.38). Such programmes are often part of wider human resource development strategies, and require sensitivity to organisational as well as individual needs. Nonetheless, guidance counsellors have a lot to offer to this kind of work, and a few are already working in this area. Encouraging and preparing them to do so might help to strengthen the links between such processes and guidance policies.

54. The second relates to career development opportunities for guidance counsellors. We were told that, particularly in the *folkeskole* and the vocational colleges, it is fairly common for guidance counsellors to move into senior management positions. It is not difficult to think of reasons why this might be so: guidance counsellors tend to have well-developed interpersonal skills, and to have a broad view of their institution and its links with other institutions and the wider community. It might be helpful to document the extent to which this happens and perhaps to give it greater legitimacy and support. At the same time, it might be useful to make it easier for guidance counsellors to remain in guidance roles but move across sectors. This will become easier if the cross-sectoral training structure is introduced and if, as suggested in para.53, the key elements of the vocational education and training reforms spread to other sectors.

55. The third relates to the wider issue of developing a stronger knowledge base within the guidance field. RUE has been devoting more attention to carrying out or commissioning evaluation reports, and the Ministry of Education has been funding development projects to encourage innovation. But the numbers of people in the guidance field in Denmark who have master's degrees or doctorates is very low, and there appears at present to be no infrastructure for building a coherent basis of theory and research to underpin policy and practice. If the field is to develop to meet the challenges that face it, this issue requires attention.

## 5.4 Quality assurance

56. In recent years, there has been growing interest in Denmark in the issue of quality assurance in relation to guidance provision. Following the publication of ethical guidelines in 1995, RUE has now published guidelines for the development of quality-assurance processes. It suggests that each specific service should discuss and agree quality criteria and set up appropriate self-assessment procedures.<sup>23</sup>

57. The one sector of education in which a more robust quality-assurance system has been established is vocational education and training (including, among others, vocational colleges and short-cycle higher education), where guidance is included as an integral part of the quality-assurance processes for the institutions as a whole; these are on a self-assessment basis, but with audit processes including spot checks to ensure that colleges are able to support what they claim. In the Public Employment Service, too, all services including guidance services are submitted to the EFQM quality-assurance model. Elsewhere, however, there is little to assure the extent or quality of what is actually delivered to individuals. This is an issue which merits further attention from the Ministry of Education if the guidance system is to be accountable.

58. One quality issue which merits particular attention is that of impartiality. The 'taximeter' system which operates in most post-compulsory education, under which the funding of institutions is linked to the number of course completions, provides incentives for institutions to maximise the enrolment and retention of students. Yet it may sometimes be in the interests of individual students not to enrol in a particular institution, or not to remain there. In this situation, there is a danger that guidance counsellors may have divided allegiances. To avoid such conflicts of interest, it is essential that they operate under agreed and transparent quality principles in this respect. The RUE guidelines cover such matters, but we were not convinced that the issue had been satisfactorily resolved in some institutions.

59. It seems that no studies of the outcomes or benefits of guidance have been conducted in Denmark<sup>24</sup>. The lack of such evidence leaves guidance very exposed when there are pressures on activities funded through public expenditure to demonstrate value for money. While recognising the methodological difficulties of such research, more attention needs to be given to this area.

## 5.5 Information provision

60. As noted in Section 5.2, one of the key roles of RUE is to provide information and resources to support the various educational and vocational guidance services. It produces a range of highly professional handbooks, guides and other resources, including ICT-based resources. Some of these are distributed free to all students; others are priced. RUE has also recently published some quality guidelines for other producers of career information, relating to such issues as accuracy and objectivity.

61. Information provision is one of the few activities in the Danish educational and vocational guidance system where a significant private sector has emerged (the only other areas are running short courses on job-seeking skills and the like for unemployed individuals, and supporting employers in setting up career-development programmes). The largest of the private publishing companies in the field (Studie og Erhverv) appears to cover some of the same areas as RUE but to have been quicker and more imaginative in harnessing ICT: its 'Se-pakken', which integrates the MAXI-DUE, SPOR and U-PLAN programmes within an on-line web-based service, is widely used in schools and colleges.

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23. Questionnaire response, question 2.3.

24. *Ibid*, question 12.4.

62. The major current information gap is labour market information. RUE and other providers sometimes include statements on labour supply and demand in their publications, but this is not done systematically. The Public Employment Service and bodies like the Regional Labour Market Councils hold a great deal of labour market information; however, inadequate mechanisms seem currently to exist for converting this into a form which enable it to be used by guidance counsellors and by individuals in their decision-making. We understand that RUE is currently giving major attention to this issue: we strongly support this. One possibility might be to create a national web-based portal for such information.

63. Here and in other areas there is clearly much potential for exploiting further the benefits of ICT, particularly as the number of on-line computers per 100 students is high at all levels compared with other European countries<sup>25</sup>. In addition to MAXI-DUE, extensive use is already made of RUE's VIDAR database, which covers education and training for adults. There are, too, some interesting private initiatives in this area. More use could however be made of institutions' own websites for guidance purposes: consideration should be given to providing support to institutions in this respect, in relation to such issues as design, quality assurance and ethical principles.

## 5.6 The feedback role of guidance

64. One further issue on which we would like to comment is the potential of guidance services for offering feedback to policy-makers and decision-makers. This tends to be a neglected guidance activity<sup>26</sup>. Yet guidance counsellors through their daily contact with individuals have access to a great deal of information on, for example, needs and aspirations which are not being met through the present education and training system.

65. It seems that this feedback role has so far been harnessed most effectively in the youth guidance follow-up system<sup>27</sup>. In this respect, we were impressed by the provision made for feedback by the Youth Guidance Service in the Municipality of Copenhagen. Information is regularly collected from youth guidance counsellors, by e-mail and other means, and fed back to local policy-makers: 'we know what they're thinking and they know what we're thinking', we were told. For example, meetings for such purposes are held periodically with local school and college principals, who usually come in person. Other feedback practices have been established by youth guidance services in a number of municipalities. We suggest that more attention might be given to such practices and extending their potential, not only in youth guidance services but also elsewhere.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

66. The strengths of the Danish educational and vocational guidance system include:

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- 25. European Commission e-Europe benchmarking report (2000): see [http://europa.eu.int/information\\_society/eeurope/benchmarking/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/benchmarking/index_en.htm)
  - 26. Though cf. Oakeshott, M. (1990), *Educational Guidance and Curriculum Change*. Further Education Unit & Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education, London.
  - 27. See e.g. Plant (1993), *op. cit.*, p.42.

- There is a wide range of services, many of them strongly embedded within the education system.
- The decentralised structure produces a rich diversity of practice, with strong local ownership of what is provided.
- In the National Council for Educational and Vocational Guidance (RUE) and the Regional Guidance Committees (VFUs), there are potential mechanisms for co-ordination and for developing, in consultation with relevant partners, coherent policies cross-cutting the various sectors involved.
- There are a number of distinctive features of the system – e.g. the youth follow-up system (para.18) and the range of ‘taster’ courses (para.16) – which are worthy of emulation by other OECD countries.

67. The weaknesses of the system include:

- Basing the main guidance services within sectors may make them inward-looking and not sufficiently effective in one of their key tasks: helping individuals not only to progress within their own sector but also to move effectively into other sectors, whether this is to other sectors of education or to the labour market.
- It seems likely that a large number of people do not have access to services: notably adults who are neither unemployed nor enrolled on educational courses.
- The system is weakly professionalised in comparison with some other OECD countries.
- There is a lack of effective quality-assurance procedures within the system. There are a lot of guidelines, but the mechanisms to assure the extent and quality of the service offered to the end-user are, on the whole, weak.

68. In policy terms, the guidance, counselling and information system in Denmark can be viewed in three main ways. The first is as a mechanism for making the education system work. In this respect the system can be regarded as strong. The second is as a mechanism for managing the education system’s relationship with the labour market. In this respect the performance of the system is much more mixed, with some strengths but also some important deficits. The third is as a mechanism for supporting lifelong learning and sustained employability for all. In these terms the system contains some strong foundations on which to build, but much remains to be done to complete the framework and enable it to operate effectively.

## APPENDIX 1: OECD REVIEW TEAM

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## APPENDIX 2: REVIEW VISIT PROGRAMME

### Monday 28 January

- 09.00 Initial briefing from National Co-ordinator: Mr. Steffen Svendsen
- 10.00 *Central policy-makers, Ministry of Education*  
Meeting at Ministry of Education with Mr. Per Bredholt Frederiksen, Mr. John Larsen, Ms. Bodil Horn, Mr. Erik Nexelmann and Mr. Jørn Skovsgaard.
- 13.30 *Education and training of professionals*  
Meeting with Dr. Peter Plant, DPU, and Ms. Heidi Graff Mortensen, DEL.
- 15.30 *Central policy-makers, Ministry of Employment*  
Meeting at Ministry for Employment with Mr. Leif Christian Hansen and Mr. Nis Frangø.

### Tuesday 29 January

- 09.00 *Guidance and counselling services for young people*  
Visit to School and Youth Guidance Service, Municipality of Copenhagen: Ms. Anni Sandberg, Ms. Lena Deleuran, Ms. Malene Jakobsen, Mr. Benny Burmeister, Mr. Jørgen Christensen, Mr. John Vinter Knudsen and Mr. Jan Ohlsen.
- 11.30 Visit to the Metropolitan Technical College (TEC): Mr. Benny Wielandt.
- 15.30 Guidance and counselling within General Upper Secondary Education: Mr. Peter Foege Jensen.  
Also presentation of web-based guidance initiative for young people [www.uddannelseogjob.dk](http://www.uddannelseogjob.dk)

### Wednesday 30 January

- 09.00 *Information services in higher education*  
Visit to IVU\*C, Copenhagen, Information Center on Higher Education: Ms. Anette Nielsen and Mr. Jan Svendsen.
- 11.00 *Co-operation across sectors and the regional guidance committees*  
Visit to careers fair at Frederiksberg Rådhus.  
Meeting with Mr. Stig Holm, Chairman of the regional guidance committee in Copenhagen.
- 13.00 *Information, guidance and counselling services for adults*  
Visit to Public Employment Service, Copenhagen: Ms. Vibeke Lauesgaard, Ms. Anne-Marie Hansen, Ms. Hanne Harding and Mr. Michel Matern.
- 15.00 Visit to VUC - Adult Education Center, Frederiksberg: Ms. Birgit Kjeldgaard, Ms. Bodil Redder and Ms. Vibeke Skov.



#### **Thursday 31 January**

- 09.00 *Stake-holders*  
Meeting with key stake-holders: Ms. Lise Skanting, DA (employers organisation); Mr. Anders Vind, LO (Confederation of Trade Unions); Mr. Flemming Christensen, FUE (confederation of practitioners).
- 11.30 *Guidance and counselling at universities*  
Visit to University of Copenhagen: Mr. John E. Andersen, Ms. Karin Klitgaard Møller and Ms. Ingrid Skovsmose Jensen.
- 14.00 *National co-ordination*  
Visit to the Danish National Council of Educational and Vocational Guidance: Ms. Lis Kofoed and Ms. Anmari Lundegaard.
- 17.00 *Private-sector publishers*  
Visit to Studie og Erhverv ([www.se.dk](http://www.se.dk)): Mr. Søren Sørensen and Mr. Søren Ødegaard.

#### **Friday 1 February**

- 10.00 *Debriefing*  
Debriefing at the Ministry of Education, Mr. Jørn Skovsgaard, Mr. Erik Nexelmann, Ms. Bodil Horn, Mr. John Larsen, Mr. Per Bredholt Frederiksen.
- 12.00 Lunch and final debriefing with National Co-ordinator.

### APPENDIX 3: SUMMARY OF SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Suggestion/recommendation	See para(s).
In relation to the individual education plans in the <i>folkeskole</i> , ensure that adequate time is made available for the process, and that it is supported by strong staff-development programmes.	15
Strengthen the provision for career education within the <i>folkeskole</i> by introducing mechanisms to assure the extent and quality of what is delivered.	17
Review the innovative guidance processes in the more informal parts of the education system to see what can be learned from them by the more formal parts of the system (e.g. in relation to encouraging entrepreneurship).	19
Review the guidance structures in the <i>gymnasium</i> and in higher education (especially the general universities) to strengthen the provision for career (as opposed to merely educational) guidance.	25-29
Offer more incentives in higher education institutions' performance contracts for support for students' effective transitions into the labour market.	29
Explore whether the requirements on higher education institutions for greater 'transparency' might include data on post-course destinations or subsequent career patterns.	29
Review the current provision for guidance for adults, especially those who are neither unemployed nor enrolled in the education system, and include in this attention to the potential of distance guidance through websites and helplines linked with face-to-face contact.	34-40
Establish new cross-sectoral centres which should see clients as well as being service centres for sector-based counsellors, and explore the possibility of doing so on an all-age basis.	42-45
Clarify the role of RUE within the policy development process.	47
Reduce the size of the RUE Council, possibly by moving some of the bodies represented there on to a separate advisory body.	47
Introduce clearer internal separation between the strategic and information roles of RUE, and minimise the time which the RUE Council devotes to the information role, perhaps by delegating it to a sub-committee.	48
Introduce a common cross-sectoral initial training programme, both to enhance links	51-52

across sectors and to strengthen the training provision in sectors in which it is currently weak; explore ways in which this programme might embrace guidance provision outside education as well as within it.	
Pay more attention in the training of guidance counsellors to the development of organisational consultancy skills.	53
Document the extent to which guidance counsellors move into senior management positions within educational institutions, and give this greater legitimacy and support; also make it easier for guidance counsellors to remain in guidance roles but move across sectors.	54
Explore ways in which a stronger infrastructure might be developed for building a coherent basis of theory and research to underpin policy and practice	55
Examine ways of introducing more robust quality-assurance systems across all areas of guidance provision, to assure the extent and quality of what is actually delivered to individuals.	57
Ensure that guidance counsellors in all sectors operate under agreed and transparent quality principles relating to the impartiality of their guidance provision.	58
Develop a strategy for collecting data on the outcomes and benefits of guidance.	59
Develop more adequate mechanisms for converting labour market information into a form which enables it to be used by guidance counsellors and by individuals in their decision-making, possibly including creating a national web-based portal for such information.	62
Encourage institutions to make more use of their websites for guidance purposes, supporting them in relation to such issues as design, quality assurance and ethical principles.	63
Examine ways of exploiting more extensively the potential of guidance services for offering feedback to policy-makers and decision-makers.	64-65



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